

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I thank You for the peace I have in Your presence;
 Lord Jesus, I receive the joy You have placed in my heart;
 Lord Jesus, I offer myself in the service of Your Gospel;
 Lord Jesus, I give all I am and everything I own to You;
 Lord Jesus, I ask You to hear these prayers; AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Music

Pray about the manner in which music is used to manipulate people's emotions, sometimes for good, and sometimes for ill, especially when used in advertisements and in films.

On-going prayers

- *Thanks God for the joy of fellowship and sharing God's good gifts*
- *Pray for people whose lives have been ruined by unemployment*
- *Pray for those affected by typhoons and earthquakes in the far East*

Meditation

If you had time to spend time with the Lord,
 How would you respond to His presence?

Would you ask Him to explain why evil exists,
 Or accept His help to defeat it?

Would you talk to him about music and worship,
 Or fall on your knees in homage?

Would you discuss the meaning of discipleship,
 Or draw strength from Him to live it?

Would you ask Him to let you do greater things,
 Or rejoice in the smallest of tasks?

Would you be proud of what you have done for Him,
 Or be willing to accept His correction?

Would you hear what He said and consider it later,
 Or open your heart there and then?

Be honest with yourself as you respond;
 Your Lord needs to know your answer!

Bible Study - Amos 3:9-15

⁹ Let it be known in the strongholds of Ashdod and in the strongholds of Egypt: 'Gather in the hills of Samaria and see the great confusion in the midst of her and the dishonesty at her very core.' ¹⁰ 'They do not know how to do what is right,' says the LORD, 'those who store up thuggery and violence in her strongholds. ¹¹ So this is what the Lord says; 'An enemy will surround the land, pull down your defences and plunder your strongholds.'

¹² This is what the Lord says; 'Just as a shepherd snatches a couple of legs or a piece of an ear from the mouth of a lion, so will the people of Israel who live in Samaria be rescued, with the corner of a bed or a piece of a couch!'

¹³ 'Hear and bring testimony against the house of Jacob,' says the Lord God, the Lord of Hosts:

¹⁴ 'For on the day when I punish Israel for her crimes, I will punish the altars of Bethel, and the horns of the altar will be cut off and fall to the ground! ¹⁵ I will tear down the winter house together with the summer house, and the houses of ivory will perish. The great dynasties will come to an end,' says the Lord.

Review

In the previous passage (3:1-8), Amos defended his right to prophesy and argued that the people of Israel should listen to the Word of God. He then loose with a most astonishing series of prophecies. It would be understandable if you did not immediately understand what Amos was saying in much of today's reading (3:9-15), but there is no doubt that it is violent. He spoke three 'mini' prophecies of stunning ferocity, verses 9 to 11, verse 12, and verses 13 to 15, and each of them leaves no doubt about the Lord's judgement on Israel because of her sins (2:6-11). We do not know what the crowds made of this, but we imagine they were furious; how could this southerner (1:1,2) have the audacity to speak to the people of Israel like this? The penalty for such insults was death, and they may well have attempted to stone Amos; but what do these three prophecies really say?

Amos began by calling the pagan nations of Philistia (from Ashdod) and Egypt (3:9) to come and see that Israel was ripe for invasion (3:10); he invited them to conquer God's land! The prophecy identified confusion and dishonesty at the heart of the nation (3:9), and corruption in high places. The Lord's assessment was this; 'They do not know how to do what is right' (3:10), so Israel would reap the judgement of invasion (3:11). If you did not believe your ears earlier when Amos prophesied that the Lord would wage war on His own people (2:13-16), then you have to do so now!

Verse 12 is known as a conundrum of almost untranslatable Hebrew! If you read different versions of the Bible, you will find that each of them tries different ways of making sense out of this rather strange passage. The translation I have given follows two principals; firstly it keeps close to the original Hebrew, and secondly, it assumes that as a shepherd, Amos had a particular 'picture' in mind when delivering this prophecy. Now, when a shepherd was confronted with a predator such as a lion which took some of his sheep and ate them, it was his duty to collect some of the animal pieces left after the slaughter as evidence of the attack. This would be presented to the owners of the sheep, for without it, the owner could accuse a shepherd of taking personal advantage of his property (by eating or trading his sheep)!

In this prophecy, Amos used this 'picture' to describe the 'pieces' of Israel left over after its tragic destruction, for use as evidence of their previous profligate existence and godless luxury; 'the corner of a bed or a piece of a couch!' In days when few people had beds and couches, these fragments would be the only evidence of the previous life of luxury the people of Israel had enjoyed before their destruction. Indeed, this is about as much as archaeologists can now find of the ancient northern kingdom of Israel!

The third of Amos' mini-prophecies described bringing the evidence of Israel's excesses and corruption to trial, and the consequent punishment that would be meted out to God's people (3:13,14). The original accusations brought against Israel were religious and social (2:6-11), and the punishments were the same. To remove 'horns' from the altars of Bethel would be to desecrate them and render the worship of God upon them meaningless, and the destruction of houses (summer and winter houses) indicated that the rich dynasties that had ruled Israel for centuries would come to an end (3:15).

It is difficult to read these prophecies, because they speak of the destruction of God's people! How could this be? I remind you again that Amos was speaking about the destruction of the northern Kingdom of Israel, the ten tribes who broke away from Jerusalem and the line of David after the time of Solomon (under Rehoboam – see 1 Kings 12f.). The capital of northern Israel was Samaria and their principle shrine was at Bethel, where Amos spoke. Amos never prophesied against Judah or Jerusalem. All this must be born in mind as we continue to study the prophecies of Amos, otherwise much of it will not make sense!

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Read through the passage carefully to make sure that you understand it after having read the study. Discuss with your group why Amos might have spoken like this.
2. How easy or hard do you find it to talk about God as one who judges nations by war, as described by Amos?
3. How do our own experiences today affect how we present God to the world, and does our own experience limit God?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Amos spoke bravely about the condition of the world as he saw it, and about the condition of the church as he saw it. The prophecies of Amos challenge me deeply because I hear so many prophecies today that

effectively congratulate the church for what it does; but I hear few that challenge God's people to respond to things they have failed to consider and address. I would believe that there was more prophecy around if I heard people being more critical and challenging in the life of the church, and yet I do not hear such things spoken in prophecy. I hear much criticism in private, within private conversations and behind closed doors. A prophet who might speak out in public would do the church a world of good..

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Think carefully about the injustices you can see happening within the life of the world at this present time, and consider whether they are reflected in the life of the church. If this is so, then pray and ask the Lord to show you how He will judge both the world today and also the churches.*
- *Pray for those who suffer because of injustice within the world and within the life of the church today. Pray that God will liberate people who are oppressed and set them free.*

Final Prayer

Amazing and wondrous Lord, You have guided Your people by a historic path on which astonishing things have happened. Do amazing things amongst us once again we pray; liberate us and remove our small-mindedness, and give us the courage to place our trust in You for everything: AMEN
